Section 11: Overview:

In this section, I'm going to cover exactly what negative SEO is and show you exactly how you can identify it. I'm going to cover the most common negative SEO tactic. And lastly, I'm going to show you exactly how you can protect your website from a negative SEO attack. So let's hop into this section and get straight into the first video.

Section 11: What Is Negative SEO And How To Identify It:

What is negative SEO? Negative SEO is effectively the opposite of positive SEO. Instead of attempting to improve a site's search ranking, the aim of negative SEO is to demote a competing site or even in some cases have it completely removed from the search results. There are tons of different negative SEO techniques people use, such as sending thousands of spam links, sending fake link removal requests, fake reviews, and so on and so on. However, regardless of the technique, I always get asked the same question which is, is negative SEO effective?

Good question and a subject of much debate. It's clear you can harm your own site by using shady SEO tactics. So it stands to reason that by employing the same techniques, you could also do similar damage to a competing website. After all, how can Google tell who built all those spammy links? The answer is yes. Negative SEO does work if the attack is sophisticated enough. However, the good news is that 99% of negative SEO attacks are far from sophisticated and all have a happy ending.

Generally speaking, rankings and traffic can be recovered to pre-attack levels as well. So how to spot a negative SEO attack? Keyword being successful. What we're looking for here are signs that someone has already succeeded in negatively affecting your rankings. The first thing to look out for is a drop in traffic. If the aim of negative SEO is to reduce your search traffic, then clearly for an attack to be considered successful, it has to do just that. So if you notice a sudden drop in your search traffic, then assuming you haven't been up to anything dodgy yourself, it could be a sign of a negative SEO attack.

Number two, a manual penalty notification. There are two types of Google penalties, one being manual and one being algorithmic. You'll generally only be able to spot the latter by notice in a drop in traffic and rankings. But if the penalty is manual, you'll get a lovely little message from Google telling you that they are taking action against your site. Again, if you've been following Best SEO Practices such as what I'm teaching in this course, then the penalty may have been triggered by a negative SEO attack. If you do get notified, then you will get notified in your Google search console, which if you don't know where that is and don't worry as I have a video later on in this course, showing you exactly how to set one up.

The third thing to look out for is a drop in individual keyword rankings. So if your search traffic is down, then the chances are your rankings are down too. Checking your rankings is another way to potentially spot a negative SEO attack. I'll show you later on in the course exactly how you

can track with your keyword positions. However, it's important to note that just because you have a drop in your rankings, it doesn't necessarily mean that you had a negative SEO attack. In the next video, I'll show the most common types of negative SEO attacks and exactly how you can deal with them. I'll see you there.

Section 11: The Most Common Negative SEO Tactic:

The most common negative SEO Tactic. The most common method I see these days is building low-quality spammy backlinks. Building a ton of low-quality links to a competitor's site is also one of the most unsophisticated forms of negative SEO. Which is good news as it means it has a less of an effect on our website. However, as we want to become the best SEO possible, it's always good practice to take action when you see an attack like this. Whether those spammy links come from cheap fibre gigs, ScrapeBox comments, spam, or a link network, the result is the same. A sudden influx of dodgy links pointing to our site. So how spam links can harm your site. There are two approaches to link spam when it comes to negative SEO. The first is what we call the volume approach. So this is blasting thousands upon thousands of low-quality links at your website.

And the second is over-optimized anchor text. So as we covered in the link loading section of this course, it's extremely important we get the anchor text optimized and go for a natural approach. You don't want too many anchors of any anchor type. This strategy plays on that and over optimizes you for certain anchor text types. Our competitor can also send loads of irrelevant anchor text as well to try and confuse Google to what your website is about. However, both of these tactics are very easy to spot. Let's head over to SEMrush and I'll show you exactly how we can identify both these types of link spam.

So I'm now over on SEMrush and I've searched for the website, blessedcbd.co.uk. So this is the website we're going to be looking at in detail when it comes to negative SEO. And the reason I picked this website, in particular, is because I was actually doing some keyword research a few weeks ago, and whilst carrying out my keyword research, I actually noticed that this website is indeed suffering from a negative SEO attack. Now, just to confirm this isn't my website, I have no affiliation with this website whatsoever. I'm simply just going to be using it as an example to showcase how you can identify a negative SEO attack. So if we go back over to SEMrush and make sure we carry out a search for the website, ensure we have the right database selected. So as this website is a, .co.uk, I've gone ahead and clicked the UK database.

Now the easiest way to identify a negative SEO attack is to check the referring domains. So let's go ahead to the left-hand side and click backlinks. And now just to confirm, and to rejig your memory, a referring domain is essentially a backlink from a unique website. So if a website has 100 referring domains, then what that means is 100 unique websites linked to this website. So if we scroll down and look at the referring domains chart, we can see that in October 2019, the website had 125 referring domains. Fast-forward to November, it had 154, fast forward to January or February 2020, it had 277 referring domains. So as you can see, it's kind of going up gradually 125, 154, 181, 232, 277, 298. And for some reason, in March 2020, it jumped up from

298 all the way up to 8,600. So as you can see from the whole chart, this isn't really the natural pattern the website has been following for the previous years.

So this is a signal that the website could indeed be suffering from a negative SEO attack. Now, this would be the first type of negative SEO attack we referred to, which would, the volume approach. So a massive influx of backlinks pointing to your website. Now, of course, this website could have invested in SEO in March, which is why they've got tons of backlinks every other month going forward. But if you do own this website and you didn't invest in any SEO or any backlinks, then this is a very good sign that your website is indeed suffering from a negative SEO attack. Now, if you want to look at exactly what those backlinks are that are linking to your website to have this sudden increase, then what you need to do is go over to the backlinks tab. So once the page has loaded, what we want to do is download all of our backlinks and then review our spreadsheet in a bit more detail.

And then we'll be able to see exactly what those backlinks are that led to the massive influx. So let's go ahead and export all of those backlinks. I will go for Excel. That has now downloaded the file. So let's go ahead and give this a try. So once you open the spreadsheet, it's going to look something pretty similar to this. Now don't be overwhelmed. There is a lot of information that SEMrush provides us with, however, we don't need all of these columns. So let's go ahead and delete the first column. Page a score, that can be deleted. Let's go ahead and delete column E, which is going to be external links. We can delete from column E all the way up to column N which is going to be site-wide. We don't need any of these columns and we can go ahead and delete the last three columns as well, which is going to be last seen, new link and lost link.

Let's go ahead and delete those columns. Let's zoom in now. So you can see the information a bit better. And what I'm going to do is select the top row, which is the name of the headings, make that in bold, and then go to view and click freeze top row. And that will just ensure the columns stay at the top as I scroll. So what we want to do now is go back over to SEMrush and figure out exactly when this negative SEO attack happened. So let's go over to SEMrush, make sure we have the same domain plugged in, go to backlinks and then make sure we are on the overview tab, like we were before. Now, as we can see from the referring domains chart, all these referring domains were built in the month of April 2020. We know that because their referring domain was 298 in March, and in April, they jumped up to 8,600.

So what that means is, in April, there were over 8,000 backlinks built to this website. So what we want to do is go back to our spreadsheet and filter our date column, which is first seen. Let's filter that by A to Z. That's now going to organize all the backlinks by when SEMrush first spotted them, for example, the 5th, 2019. And then we simply want to scroll down until we see the date which is going to be 2020, which is April 2020. And it's essentially going to match up with the referring domains chart. So I'm going to scroll down now and find that date and see all the backlinks that were built, which has led to the negative SEO attack. So let's scroll down and we can see we're now in 2020, we want to scroll down until we find the 4th, we're in the 2nd.

Let's zoom in a little bit more as well, just so you can see that. And you can now see, we can see all the backlinks built in April 2020. So the source URL is the page which is linking to this website. The target URL is the page which the source URL links to. And the anchor text is the anchor text this source URL uses. So essentially you can see all of these backlinks right here. We've got some from roszittpl or tlp.info. We've got some from blog unitel direct. Tons, and tons of websites are linking to this website all in the month of April. Now, if you didn't build any of these backlinks, then this is a very good sign indeed that it is going to be a negative SEO attack. Now it's really important to note as well, that if your blog post has gone viral for example, then this can also lead to a massive influx of backlinks.

However, if you haven't had any blog posts go viral in the last few months, then it's very likely that the massive influx of links your website is getting is going to be from a negative SEO attack. So now we've covered the first method, it's time to cover the second most common negative SEO attack, which is over optimized anchor text, or an irrelevant anchor text. So this is essentially where websites link to you and they all use the same anchor text, which you're trying to target, which may be your target match keyword. It could be using an anchor text which is completely irrelevant to your website. So the main aim here is to try to throw Google off and confuse Google what your website is actually about. So we can very easily identify this using SEMrush. Now, for the purpose of this example, I'm going to be using a website called a ceres-pr.co.uk, which is actually a food marketing agency based in the United Kingdom.

Now, once again, I do not own this website. I have no affiliation with this website whatsoever. I'm just going to be using it as an example for this training video. So what we're going to do is take the website and plug it into SEMrush and simply carry out a search for this website. I'm going to go ahead and click the UK database as the website is obviously a, .co.uk. So once the information has loaded, what we want to do is go over to the backlinks tab just like we did before. And then what we want to do is go over to the tab which says, anchors. This is now going to show us all the anchor texts which this website has. So we can see in total that it has 422 different types of anchor text. We've got Ceres, which is a brand name.

We've got ceres-pr. Again, another variation of the brand name. We have the URL. We've got a ceres-pr together, ceres partnership. We have another URL and so on and so on. Now, if we go over to the top where it says top anchor terms, this will actually give us an overview of all of the anchor text this website has. So we can see that Ceres, again, which is a brand name. This is mentioned 31% of the time, which is pretty much natural as it's a branded name. There's 444 links which mention Ceres in the anchor text. Viagra, which is a very interesting one indeed. This is mentioned 14% of the time. Now we've got another weird anchor text as well, 10% of the time we've got online and we've got buyers, which both have 7% and 5%. Now out of the top five most used anchor text, only one of them is actually relevant to the business.

The other four are completely irrelevant and have no relevance to what their website offers at all. Now, remember the website is about food marketing. However, four of the top five anchor text terms are completely irrelevant. So this is a really good example of where someone has carried out a negative SEO attack on this website. And they've tried to throw Google off and

confuse Google to what the website is actually about. Now, if you want to see what these websites are linking to you which uses irrelevant anchor text terms, you can simply scroll down to the chart below. And when you find a mention of an irrelevant anchor text, such as this one right here, Viagra discount, you can actually go ahead and click the number, which is going to be three, and essentially what this does is it tells you that you have three links linking to your website which mention that as an anchor text. And SEMrush actually shows you all of those websites which are linking to you in the first place.

So now you know how to spot the most two common negative SEO attacks. In the next video, I'm going to show you exactly how to deal with these attacks and protect your website. I'll see you there.

Section 11: How To Protect Your Website From A Negative SEO Attack:

So I've just shown you how to identify both types of spammy link building. The next step is defending your website from these spammy links. The first protocol would be to reach out to all of the websites and ask them to remove those backlinks. If they don't, then your best bet is going to be disavowing those backlinks. Disavowing links involves uploading the list of links to Google in a specific format which basically tells Google, I don't vouch for these links. Please ignore them. To do this, we're going to be used in SEMrush, which is another reason why I recommend this software as you can do so many things with it.

So for the purpose of this video, I'm going to be using the same website which I showcase in the last video, which was blessedcbd.co.uk. So to find all the spammy backlinks, let's just copy the URL. Go over to SEMrush. Carry out a search. And then once the information has loaded, we want to go over to the left-hand side of the pane and click Backlinks. However, before I do that, let me just go ahead and click UK to make sure we have the right database selected. As again, it's the same website and it's a .co.uk domain. So let's go ahead and click Backlinks. And then if we go over to our Overview tab which should be selected by default.

Again, just to confirm, although I ran through it in the last video, the negative SEO attack seem to appear in April as it is when they had the majority of referring domains built to the website. So let's go over to Backlinks. And then what we can do, we can actually view those backlinks which were built in April 2020, review those backlinks, and then decide if we should disavow them or not. So we can see when the backlink was built by looking at the column which says First Seen. And as I showed you in the last video, you can actually export all of these backlinks and then just filter through the spreadsheet to see which backlinks are relevant and which ones should actually be disavowed.

But essentially, once you find a backlink which you'd like to disavow, all you need to do is click this plus icon in the right-hand column which is under the column which says Disavow. So let's just pretend that this is a really bad backlink, and it's one we haven't built ourselves. It's very spammy and was most likely built by one of our competitors as an attempt for a negative SEO. Then what we want to do is go ahead and click the plus icon on the Disavow, and then it will

give you two options to move the link as a domain or move it as a URL. You always want to opt for choosing a domain and not a URL.

The reason being is, if you click domain, what this will actually do, this will add the domain to your disavow list and not the URL. So if you have multiple links all coming from the same domain pointing to your website and you select URL, it's only going to disavow one URL and not all the links coming from the domain. Now typically, when it comes to negative SEO and people building tons of low-quality spammy links, what they'll do, they'll actually build over 100 different spammy backlinks all from the same website. So instead of disavowing 100 different URLs, you can actually just go for the domain.

What that will do is disavow every single link coming from the same domain. So let's go ahead and click Domain. And as you can see, it says, the domain has been added to your disavow list. So this would be the same process for all of your backlinks. You just go through the backlinks, review the date. We have a link right here from builderwppage.com, invisible WordPress themes which really and truly has nothing to do with CBD, which is what the website is about. So again, if this is a website you'd like to disavow, you can go ahead and click the plus icon to add that to your disavow list. Once again, go for the domain, and you can see the domain has been added to our disavow list.

So essentially, what you want to do is go through all of your backlinks in the period where you saw a massive increase in referring domains and get them added to your disavow list. Now, if you're ever unsure whether you should disavow a domain or not, you can always open the website URL in a different browser and check out the website's domain authority. If the website has a low domain authority, then you definitely want to disavow that website. So that covers the first strategy, which is disavowing tons of low-quality spammy links pointing at your website. Now, I'm going to show you how you can disavow backlinks which are using over optimized anchor texts or irrelevant anchor texts.

So to do so, all we need to do is first find those websites which are linking to our website with the irrelevant anchor texts. So all you need to do is scroll to the top of SEMrush, under Backlinks, and then go to Anchors as showcased in the last video. And then what you want to do is that you click any of the anchor text which you believe is going to be irrelevant. So maybe this anchor text right here, it says scam. And you can see it's linked to this website over 6,000 different times. This is essentially 6,000 different backlinks and not 6,000 referring domains. So let's go ahead and give this number a click. And as you can see, we can now see all of the backlinks which are linking to this website using the anchor text scam.

Now, what we want to do is go links per referring domain and click that to one, and you can see that 6,000 is now going to go down to just 801. So it's the same thing we want to do here. Once you've got a shortlist of all the referring domains which are linking to our website using irrelevant anchor text, we want to go ahead and simply click, add it to disavow lists and then go for domain. So you want to go ahead and do this to all the domains which are using irrelevant or over-optimized anchor texts. So once you've gone through all of your backlinks and you've

submitted them all to your disavow list, the next step is to download your disavow list and actually upload it to Google.

Now, just because you've added these domains to your disavow list within SEMrush, it doesn't mean Google automatically knows about them. This is why we have to carry out the additional step of actually downloading this list and then uploading it to Google. So to view all the domains you have on your disavow list, all you simply need to do is get the bottom right here which says Disavow list, and you can see to the right of it, it says number five. This means that I have five domains added to my disavow list. So let's go ahead and give this a click. And as you can see, SEMrush has now listed what those five domains are.

So once you're happy with the domains you have on your disavow list, you can go ahead and click Export to txt, which if you open the downloaded file, it will look something like this; Exported from semrush.com, domain, and then it lists the five domains, and then it has URLs at the bottom. So we don't actually need these two lines at the top, so they can be deleted, and we don't need the URLs at the bottom as well. Literally, all we need is this part right here; domain, colon, and then the name of the website which you'd like to disavow all the backlinks from. So once you're happy with your file, you want to go ahead and you should save that onto your desktop or wherever you like to save on your computer.

And then the next step is uploading this to Google. So to submit your disavow file to Google, what you need to do is go over to Google and literally search for Submit disavow file Google. The top link that Google returns you should be Disavow Links Tool-Google Search Console, which if you'd give it a click, it will actually open your Google Search Console and will allow you to disavow specific backlinks. Now, if you're not sure what a Google Search Console is, then please refer to the Google Search Console video which is showcased in the technical SEO section of the course. So as I don't own this website, Blessed CBD, I obviously don't have the option to disavow links for that website. I just have my standard ClickSlice SEO agency website here. However, let's just imagine this is Blessed CBD.

I would go ahead and make sure I have my website selected. Go ahead and then click disavow links. This will now give me a warning just asking me, do I definitely want to continue as this is an advanced feature? I want to go ahead, and say yes, which is basically clicking Disavow links. This is now going to open an option where I can upload a txt file which is going to be the one we've just downloaded from SEMrush. So essentially, that is how you disavow any bad backlinks that you have pointing to your website. So once that file is uploaded, Google is going to review all the domains on that txt file and then ignore those backlinks pointing to my website, which basically means those websites are not going to have any negative effect on your website, and it means that your website is going to be in good standing order and will not have any negative effects from this negative SEO attack.